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LACK OF COMPANY

AT THE

DAILY EUCHARIST.

BY

JAMES S. POLLOCK, M.A.,

PRIEST OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

"Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you."—GENESIS XLIII. 2.

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LACK OF COMPANY AT THE DAILY EUCCHARIST.

"THERE shall be no Communion except four (or three at the least) communicate with the priest."¹ The Daily Eucharist is God's ordinance ; but this rule of the English Church seems to render obedience difficult, if not impossible. So argues not "the slothful man " only, but even many a zealous Catholic, who sighs for better things.

Let us ask first, Does the Rubric in its strictest interpretation compel our general neglect of the Daily Sacrifice? Are there not many parishes, in town and country, where three or four daily communicants might be found? Surely the more earnest of our parishioners would cheerfully prepare for frequent communion on week-days, and might be more or less organized for the purpose. Special instruction and devotions might be provided for them ; and much spiritual work could be done, even apart from the inestimable " benefits " of the Sacrament.

It must, however, be confessed, that in many parishes three communicants could not always be ensured. In this case is the effort to be given up as hopeless? Is the ordinance of God to be broken? Must the priest, sent as a lamb in the midst of wolves, desert the altar because the wolf has scattered the

¹ Rubric at the end of the Communion Office.

sheep? "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." But can a true shepherd, that loves his flock, deny the bread of life to the remnant that is left, *because* its number is so small? Or, on the other hand, is the rule of the Church to be disregarded? What avails it that the priests "keep the watch of the Lord by His holy temple, and by the altar," if by doing so they break the laws which ought to bind them? And can daily bread profit a disobedient people? Is it well for us, priests or people, thus to "get our bread with the peril of our lives?"

Of course we must obey God rather than man; but that is not the question. The Daily Eucharist is an ordinance of God, and the Rubric in question is a precept of the Church of God in England. It is hard to believe that these are contrary the one to the other.

What, then, are we to do? "The Lord's Prayer" we cannot alter; the Lord's promise we must desire; the Lord's command we must obey. The bread of life is daily bread: the Eucharistic Presence is to be with us "all the days, even unto the end of the world."¹ We fear the doom of those who make the word of God of none effect through their traditions.

The meaning of the precept we cannot doubt; and no private interpretations of ours now can set aside the judgment of the Church. But what of the Rubric, which seems to throw difficulties in our way? Plain as it appears to be, are we sure that we understand it? It may be that we have misinterpreted it, or mistaken the intention of those who wrote it? Such, it appears, has been the case. The Rubric in question should not encourage the slothful, or alarm the scrupulous.

¹ S. Matt. xviii. 20.

I. In the first place let it be granted that we may not "so expound one [Rubric] that it be repugnant to another."¹ The Rubric concerning three communicants must, therefore, agree with that which follows it :—"In Cathedral and Collegiate Churches and Colleges, where there are many Priests and Deacons, they shall all receive the Communion with the Priest every Sunday at the least, except they have a reasonable cause to the contrary."

Let not the Rubric just quoted be mistaken. Here is no order for the frequent *celebration* of the Holy Eucharist. It is an injunction binding "all" Priests and Deacons in Cathedrals and Colleges to, at least, weekly *communion*, and recommending every one of them to seek a more than weekly reception. The necessity of a Daily Celebration is of course implied here; for, without it, all might not be able to obey the precept, or comply with the recommendation. But the Rubric is evidently intended for the benefit of the clergy; their frequent communion is the precept; and the Daily Celebration is a necessary inference.

And now let us enquire, Does the Church lay every one of the cathedral and collegiate clergy under such strict obligations, and show no care for the parochial clergy? Take the case of a priest in a collegiate church appointed to a living. He has been for many years obliged to communicate weekly, and rightly judging it to be extreme profanity to receive always "the least" number of times required by the Rubric, has often communicated on week-days. In his new parish there are few communicants: the number has dwindled down sadly through past neglect. He is determined to attempt a reformation, and feels it only right to begin by reforming himself. He will not be content with weekly communion, the least degree of

¹ Article XX.

frequency permitted hitherto. He will celebrate daily, and thus seek the greatest help that his Master has provided for him. Can it be that the pious intent must be frustrated? The Church urged that priest while at his college to communicate on week-days; and does she forbid him the same privilege because he cannot always obtain three communicants? Is the soul of the priest less precious now than it was before? Does he need less help in his laborious "sole charge" than during former days of comparative ease? "A reasonable excuse" then *exempted* him from discharging his duty; shall he now be *prevented* from discharging the same duty in spite of the reasonable excuse afforded by his people's neglect or unbelief? He enjoyed his daily bread while his spirit was refreshed by the communion of saints: must the ox be muzzled now *because* he treadeth out the corn alone, and *because* his strength faileth under the heavy yoke? Yes, as it seems, the solitary priest must be scantily fed while he "wears away" under a burden that is too heavy for him. After a while, when his work has flourished, and he has "many priests and deacons" to help him, and is "able to endure" the "easier"¹ duty, then he may, perhaps must have that for which his hungry and thirsty soul panted in vain! Is this a consistent interpretation of the Rubric? True, a woman may forget her infant, and perhaps our Mother Church deals hardly with her sons—correcting them for her pleasure and not for their profit—strengthening them when most refreshed, starving them when solitary and in want!

Enough has been said on this point to show that the Rubric in question is not so clear as it seems. Certainly Bishop Pepys's theory is not altogether incorrect. One Rubric at least is not to be observed with "Chinese exactness."

¹ Exod xviii.

II. We have hitherto supposed that the Rubric about cathedrals and colleges is obeyed. But the shameful and notorious fact is that it is *universally* disobeyed. The rule of the Church enjoining a weekly *reception* at the least, by *all* members of a community where there are many priests and deacons is confessedly neglected everywhere. Must we, notwithstanding this, be forced to observe the strict letter of the law, which seems to prohibit celebration when there are not three to communicate with the priest? Certainly the breaking of one law does not authorize the breaking of another. But what is to become of us, if we systematically disobey the law requiring frequent communion, and at the same time carefully obey the law which, as we think, restrains it?

III. We now go on to ask, Why should English priests *select* the Rubric in question, and boast of their strict conformity to it?

There is a familiar Rubric which requires all priests and deacons to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer, not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause. The Daily Offices, moreover, must be said in Church, not if the people come, but that they may come—not to comply with, but to excite their desire.

Now it is superfluous to dwell upon the patent fact that this Rubric has been generally neglected even by the greatest and holiest divines of the Church of England since the Reformation.¹ If, therefore, we err in irregularly restoring the Christian Sacrifice, let it be remembered *who* set the example by neglecting the excellent Anglican tradition of Daily Morning and Evening Prayer. If our efforts to restore the

¹ See Tracts for the Times, No. 84. Robertson's "How shall we conform to the Liturgy," pp. 37—55.

Daily Offering be repudiated, then let the sepulchres of England's greatest prophets be thrown down. Or at least, though no man move their bones on account of the testimony which they gave for Catholic truth, let them be branded for ever as "disobedient" prophets.

IV. Let us turn now to the Rubrics concerning the Communion of the Sick. In church there must be four communicants, or three at the least: in the Communion of the Sick the same number is required, "three, or two at the least," and the sick man. One of the Rubrics instructs the Priest how to comfort a sick person who "for lack of company," or by any "other just impediment" does not receive the Blessed Sacrament. A subsequent Rubric provides that, if the disease be infectious, the priest and such man may communicate alone.

But now take another case. Suppose the two communicants cannot be found, and that the disease is not infectious. How must the priest act? In this case, it seems, the sick man must die without the Sacrament. "Lack of Company to receive with him," is one of the "just impediments" that are removed only by infectious disease. The fact that this one exception is made proves the rule in all other cases. The defect of lack of company can be got over only in one way: infectious disease has a peculiar efficacy, and obtains for the sick man a special privilege.

The Rubric says this most plainly, but of course it does not mean it. Perhaps it does mean it, and in that case we may suppose the following conversation to pass between the conscientious priest and his dying parishioner:—

"My dear friend, I am most anxious to administer the Holy Communion to you, but I cannot."

"And why not, sir? I've often taken the Sacrament at Church, and must I die without it now?"

"I am very sorry, but you know I am a priest of the Church of England, and, having promised to obey the Prayer Book, I cannot break the Rubric under any circumstances. I've walked about all the morning and can't get two communicants. Mrs. A. is ill, and Miss B. is out for the day, and the Misses D. are at the sea-side. I had a friend with me this morning but he could not come, for he lives in the next parish.¹ Mrs. E. who lives next door might communicate with us, but then we must have another, I'm quite grieved about it, but be comforted, because 'if you truly repent of your sins, and stedfastly believe,' &c. (See Rubric).

"But oh, Mr. Wooden, dear Mr. Wooden, that's very good; but why can't I have the Sacrament *Itself*?"

"Impossible! I'm very very sorry, but you know I can't give you the Communion—for—for—lack of company."

"Company, Sir! Oh, don't mock me, you that always used to be kind to me. Don't you see me, Mr. Wooden? I'm dying, you know, I've got to die *alone*."

"Pray don't get excited. You'll hurt yourself. There now, You're better. You know I can't give you the Sacrament without two Communicants."

"Two more! Oh, Mr. Wooden, what does it all mean? When I went to Communion at Church you used to say the words to each of us separately as if the Lord was given to every one, whether other people were there or not."

"Yes, so it is—'given for *thee*'—'shed for *thee*.'"

"Well, can't I have *that* without company? Does

¹ Canon 28. "Strangers not to be admitted to the Communion."

the Lord not care for the sick, or come to them when they are alone? I won't believe it. 'The Lord is my Shepherd—He shall feed me—Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil—Thou art with me—Thou shalt prepare a table—My cup shall be full.'

"Yes, hear what comfortable words these are—'The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing.' Think of that."

"Lack nothing! But you said I lacked company, and must die without the Sacrament. Oh! Mr. Wooden, *isn't* there company? Thou art with me and *you* too. On either side one, and Jesus in the midst. It's you, mind, that wants to take the Lord from the Cross. *I'm on the other side.* Lord, remember me—Oh! don't rob me of my Saviour."

The poor priest is almost in despair, when a bright thought comes to his mind. There is no lack of non-communicant company in the room. Mr. Wooden asks, "Tell me, is the disease *at all* infectious, do you think?"

"Oh dear no, sir, not at all. Don't be afraid, sir. It won't hurt you. The doctor says there isn't any thing taking in it."

Poor Mr. Wooden, his last hope is gone. But he is a strict "Conformist" and has at least the satisfaction of feeling that he has discharged his painful duty with fortitude and determination.

Now, we ask, was Mr. Wooden doing his duty or not? Apparently he was right. The Rubric seems to be in his favour. But let us look a little further into the matter.

The history of the Rubrics on this subject is soon told. In 1549 the sick man was directed to signify to the curate "how many be appointed to communicate with him." Another Rubric said, "The sick

man shall always desire some either of his own house, or else of his neighbours, to receive the holy Communion with him, for that shall be to him a singular great comfort and of their part a great token of charity." In 1552 "a good number to communicate with the sick person" was required, and "lack of company" was declared to be a "just" impediment to Communion. In 1662 a further change was made: our present rule does not require "a good number" but only "three, or two at the least."

At first sight it appears that the Church of England ever since the Reformation has required the sick man to provide some friends to communicate with him. But was this rule observed, or did the Church intend it to be invariable? Not so. In 1549 the sick man was obliged, according to the Rubric, to signify how many would communicate with him, and was strictly commanded *always* to desire some to shew this great token of charity. Even at that time the attendance of communicants was optional; for throughout the Office wherever mention is made of such persons these words are added:—"if there be any." The directions contained in our present Office differ not materially from those of 1549. The apparently strict rules about lack of company takes the place of the ordinance which required the sick man *always* to provide some to communicate with him. "Three, or two at the least" are mentioned in a parenthesis; and afford a seasonable protest against the "good number" whom the Puritans of 1552 would have crowded into the room, to smother the sick man, and to make the service less "lyke in effecte unto a private Masse." The reinsertion of the parenthesis, "if there be any," is not needed. It was inconsistent with the rule of 1549, which ordered that some friend should "always" communi-

cate with the sick man ; it would be equally inconsistent with our present rules. Our duty apparently is to follow the direction of the Rubric as far as possible ; but, if we cannot "always" obtain two communicants, to prefer mercy to sacrifice. "When none of the parish or neighbours can be gotten to communicate with the sick in their houses for fear of the infection, upon special request of the diseased, the Minister may only communicate with him." And so while "the infection of nature doth remain,"¹ and the plague of sin keeps back so many from the altar, the same liberty must be used. Plague, pestilence, hardness of heart, and contempt of God's Word and Commandments have the same result. I repeat therefore that the Rubric apparently says that lack of company forbids the Communion of the sick, but that in reality it does not mean any thing so cruel. When with their dying breath the children of the Church ask from her the Bread of Life, she does not oblige her priests to mock the cravings of the hungry soul by the reading of a hard, stone-cold Rubric about lack of company.

Apply all this to the case of the Rubric which seems to forbid the offering of the Daily Sacrifice in church except three communicants be ready to partake. The history of the Rubrics regarding celebrations in church and with the sick is nearly the same. In 1549 there was to be no celebration at church "except there be some to communicate with the priest." In 1552 and 1559 "a good number" was required, and "four, or three at the least" must communicate where there were only twenty communicants. In 1604 and 1662 the latter Rubric continues as before, but the "good number" is changed into "sufficient number."

¹ Article IX.

Mark, there is no Rubric about lack of company, enjoining spiritual communion in case of such a misfortune. Even if such a Rubric had been added, we must have interpreted it in the same way as that in the Office for the Communion of the Sick: we must have considered it a general, but not absolute rule. And if, in spite of the apparently cruel ordinance, so often referred to, the rule, directing three communicants to be present and partake at the Communion of the Sick, does, as we have proved, admit of exceptions, much more must we give a liberal interpretation to *the same rule* which has been made with regard to celebrations in church, and which is not strengthened by any allusion to lack of company.

It is very easy to say in reply that irregularities may be allowed in the case of the dying which would be inexcusable at church. But the obvious answer is that we are all dying, and that no priest realizes the solemnity of his office, who does not, to use Baxter's phrase, minister "as dying unto dying men."

You allow a relaxation of the rule in the case of the dying. Who are the dying? Let this question be answered, and the limitation pleaded for will be granted at once. Who then, I ask, are the dying? Must we include under that description the man who is apparently "in a dying state;" but who after the priest has administered the Holy Sacrament to him alone "for lack of company," lingers on for a week or two afterwards? Or may we not far more appropriately include the man who goes in apparent health to an early celebration before his day's work begins, who is refused the Sacrament for lack of company, and dies suddenly at mid-day—perhaps at the very hour when the so-called dying man is, without company, receiving the Holy Communion. When Bishop Mackenzie denied himself the blessing

of Communion, because only one Christian was with him, he did not know that he was dying, and that before many days he would die without his *Viaticum*.¹

One word of explanation must be added before we pass on. Let no one suppose that the Rubric about lack of company involves any depreciation of the Blessed Sacrament or denial of the Catholic faith regarding It. We have proved that the rule admits of exceptions, that our Mother Church would not have us to substitute the hearing of some good words of hers for the receiving of the true WORD of God. But it is sufficient to observe that the Church of England in pre-Reformation times had its "*tantum crede et manducasti*" for the comfort of her sick members who were incapable of oral reception. However the terms of the two Rubrics may differ, the principle is the same.

V. Our last enquiry is this,—Can the Rubric be carried out? I am not going to discuss the question of "non-communicating attendance;" nor need I enter into a dissertation on the first Rubric in the Communion Office of the Church of England. I am content simply to deal with the two facts.—First, that some persons seek Communion in the prayers when not intending to partake; Secondly, that people do not now signify beforehand their intention of partaking. How then, I ask, can the Rubric, which requires three communicants at each celebration, be strictly obeyed? People are not obliged to make known their intention of partaking, and no one pleads for a constant observance of the rule; therefore the priest cannot know before going to church whether he will have three communicants or not. All present do not necessarily communicate, therefore the priest cannot know how many will do so till they

¹ "Union Review," July, 1864.

approach the altar. Hence, if three persons are in church the priest must consecrate, except he knows that one of them will not communicate.

This last argument seems to decide the question in a plain straightforward manner. No subtle reasoning is needed here, we have only to open our eyes and see the real state of affairs. Argue or reason on this point as we may, we cannot safely ignore facts. Our fine-spun theories must, after all, give way in obedience to the stern appeals of common sense—our morbid over-scrupulousness to the rightful claims of those devout members of the Church for whom she framed her rules.

Much more might be said on this subject, but I forbear. It may be convenient to recapitulate the argument in a few words:—

I. The Rubric in question must not be so interpreted, as to be inconsistent with that immediately following it. It seems improbable that the Church should intend the rigid observance of a rubric, which might prevent some of the parochial clergy from communicating even the least number of times allowed to the Cathedral and Collegiate clergy.

II. We have supposed that the Rubric about the Cathedral and Collegiate clergy is observed. But that rubric is universally neglected. Here our argument advances a step further. The existence of the rule with regard to the Cathedral and Collegiate clergy seemed to make it probable that the apparently inconsistent rule with regard to the parochial clergy might admit of exceptions. The universal neglect of that rule seems to prove that the exceptions before supposed, must be *more or less authorized*—or, if not authorized, connived at.

III. It seemed strange that the Church should make apparently strict rules, and yet allow them to

be relaxed. But the disuse of the Daily Prayers by nearly all of England's most earnest priests in time past, shows that *such must be the case*.

IV. Coming nearer to the point, we find that the Rubrics concerning the Communion of the Sick in 1549 were contradictory, apparently requiring that some persons should "always" communicate with the sick man, yet admitting exceptions freely—that the alterations made by the Puritans in 1552 have been disapproved, and that the rubrics on this point now differ not materially from those of 1549. The presence of three communicants at the Communion of the Sick is ordered as in 1549, but *the rule must still admit of exceptions*. Much more are our rules concerning public celebrations, capable of receiving a liberal interpretation, for they contain no allusion to "lack of company."

V. Priests and people must make an honest effort to obey the Rubric in its literal interpretation. Yet we may sometimes fail—and that through circumstances completely beyond our control.

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